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Dedio, Stefan ; Widmer, Paul

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S, A, and P argument demotion with preverbal *imm-(a-^N)* in Old and Middle Irish

Stefan Dedio¹ and Paul Widmer¹

¹University of Zurich

The intricate preverbal complex of Early Irish hosts a morpheme *imm-(a-^N)* with very peculiar constructional and semantic properties. In this article, we venture to give a description of *imm-(a-^N)* by taking into account the various changes it induces on argument representation, and explore how it modifies the semantics of the verb stem it combines with. The chronology of the data at our disposal suggests that it first denoted reciprocal states of affairs and quickly developed into a device expressing collective simultaneous action events (CSA, i. e., multiple participants perform the same action in the same temporal and locational setting, but not on each other) and from the point of view of semantics are treated as active verbs. As far as argument representation is concerned, it develops into a construction which combines both features of the passive (subject demotion) and the antipassive (object demotion) diathesis.¹

1 Introduction

In a short communication, O'Brien (1938, 242–4) provides a succinct account of the use of *imm-(a-^N)*² (eDIL, s. v. *imma n-*, <http://edil.qub.ac.uk/27638>) and very accurately distinguishes two constructions, namely a “personal reciprocal” construction with plural verbal endings that agree with the subject in the nominative (cf. 3PL in ex. 1), and a second, “impersonal”, construction with the verb invariably in the 3SG in which the arguments are marked with the preposition *do* (ex. 2a) or *do* and *fri* (ex. 2b).³

- (1) *immu-s-múchat in doíni*
imm-3PL-suppress.PRS.3PL ART man.NOM/ACC.PL
'the people suppress each other'

(TBF, p. 51)

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2 *imm-(a-^N)* is a purely conventional cover form for all morphonological manifestations subsumed under *imma n-* in eDIL, <http://edil.qub.ac.uk/27638>. Superscript *N* in *imm-(a-^N)* indicates the potential morphonological nasalization of the following segment.

3 Abbreviations used in the glosses: 1 = first person, 2 = second person, 3 = third person, A = first argument of a two-place predicate, ACC = accusative, ART = article, DAT = dative, EMPH = emphatic (particle), FUT = future, G = third argument of a three-place predicate, GEN = genitive, HAB = habitual, HON = honorific, IMPF = imperfective, INDEF = indefinite, INT = intensifier, M = masculine, N = neuter, NEG = negative, NOM = nominative, P = 2nd argument of a two-place predicate, PASS = passive, PL = plural, PLUP = pluperfect, POSS = possessive, PRO = pronoun, PRS = present, PRT = preterite, PST = past, PTCL = particle, PV = preverb, REC = reciprocal, REFL = reflexive, S = single argument of a one-place predicate, SG = singular, SOC = sociative, SUBJ = subjunctive, TRANS = transitive, VN = verbal noun. In all examples, we separate relevant morphemes, particles, and clitics with hyphens. Initial mutations are treated as part of the following formant.

- (2) a. *ó-ma-nacca dóib ri suilsi ind láí*
 when-imm-an-see.PST.3SG to.3PL at light.DAT.SG ART.GEN.SG day.GEN.SG
 ‘when they saw each other by the light of day’ (Tochmarc Ferbe; IT, vol. 3, pp. 492, 394)
- b. *imma-narladair dó iarum fri-a da brathair*
 imman-talk.PST.3SG to.3SG then against-his two brothers
 ‘then he talked to his two brothers’⁴ (BM2, p. 80)

As usual, Thurneysen’s (GOI, 517f.) presentation of the relevant facts contains a detailed and most useful description: *imm-(a^N)* is etymologically related to the preposition *imm*, *imb* ‘around, about’ and the lexical preverb *imm*· ‘id.’, and can occur in combination with prepositions forming adverbs like *imm-a-netar* ‘mutually’, *imm-a-lle* ‘together, simultaneously’ or *imm-a-sech* ‘in turn’, and with verbs, forming reciprocals.

Thurneysen (GOI, 516–518) and O’Brien (1938, 242–244) assume *imm-(a^N)* to be identical with the lexical preverb *imm*· but note that it is never accented when used with reciprocal force as is illustrated in exx. 3a and 3b: in 3a, the accent lies on the lexical preverb *imm*·, resulting in the lenition of the initial consonant of the root *téit*, while in 3b, the position of the infix pronoun *-n-* shows that the accent lies on the first syllable of the prototonic form *·accamar*. If *imm-* were accented, syncope and subsequent phonological processes would yield a form ***ni-n-imchamar*. Therefore *imm-(a^N)* is treated as a conjunct particle distinct from the lexical preverb *imm*· (“unechte Komposition”; VGK, vol. 2, p. 248). Ex. 3b also shows that *imm-(a^N)* does occupy neither the same slot as the negation *ní* nor as the infix pronouns. The position of the augment *ro* in ex. 3c indicates that it can in fact co-occur with *imm-(a^N)* and thus does not occupy the same preverbal slot either.

- (3) a. *ni-’imthesid cen imdéicsin*
 NEG-travel.PRS.SUBJ.3PL without look.around.VN.ACC
 ‘you should not travel without circumspection’ (Wb. 22c4)
- b. *ni-mu-n-’accamar*
 NEG-imm-1PL-see.PST.1PL
 ‘we have not seen one another’ (Wb. 18d3)
- c. *imma-ra-gaib doib ci-p-é dib no-digsed*
 imman-PST-agree.3SG.PST to.3PL who-be.3SG.PRS.SUBJ-3SG.M of.3PL PTCL-REL.go.PST.SUBJ.3SG
 ‘And they decided that he who was the first of them to die ...’ (Días macclérech; LL, p. 36245)

Building on the findings of O’Brien and Thurneysen,⁵ we will first discuss the different construction types as defined by argument marking and argument representation (verbal ending, infixing, case, prepositions; section 2), secondly elaborate on the range of semantic diversity of the derived constructions involving *imm-(a^N)* (section 3) and finally sketch the diachrony of the *imm-(a^N)* constructions (section 4). In section 5 we discuss the findings and provide a summary of this article.

It should be noted that this article aims at a first detailed description of the Early Irish constructions containing *imm-(a^N)*. The data presented in this paper has been drawn from various sources (most prominently eDIL, s. v. *imma n-* and including Kavanagh 2001; Griffith and Stifter n.d.) and is by no means exhaustive. Testing our conclusions and categorisations against a larger corpus of Early Irish prose would be desirable.

2 Construction types

O’Brien (1938, 242–243) and Irslinger (2017, 114–116) recognize two constructions that are basically distinguished by the referentiality of the infix pronoun and the verbal ending, and by whether nominal

⁴ The transitive reading of this example will be discussed in sections 2.5 and 3.

⁵ Irslinger’s (2017, 114–116) short treatment of Early Irish *imm-(a^N)* summarises the work of O’Brien and Thurneysen, adding a list of verbs used with *imm-(a^N)*.

participants of the verbal action are introduced by the preposition *do* ‘to’ or sometimes *fri* ‘against’. While these two broader characterisations seem basically correct, the analysis of our material reveals a larger spectrum of six constructions that will be discussed below in detail.

The most important kind of morphosyntactic changes caused by adding *imm-(a^N)* to a verbal stem relates to argument realisation. These changes occur on morphosyntactic devices that are commonly involved in Old and Middle Irish argument selection, namely pronominal infixes, verbal endings, argument marking, and verbal agreement. Note that following Bickel and Nichols 2009, p. 307; Bickel 2011, p. 402; Witzlack-Makarevich 2010, 57f. we define arguments numerically as set of generalized semantic roles in the following manner: the *s* argument is the only argument of a one-argument predicate. In two-argument predicates *A* stands for the more agent-like and *P* for the more patient-like argument. Three-place predicates feature, in addition to the most agent-like *A* argument, the more patient-like *G* argument, and the *T* argument, which is the neither more agent-like, nor more patient-like argument of a three-argument predicate.

These devices respond to the addition of *imm-(a^N)* in the following way (summarized in Table 1):

Pronominal infixes commonly index the argument that assumes the *P* role (also with speech act participants in passive constructions, cf. GOI, p. 256). When the infix co-occurs with the allomorph *imm-* of *imm-(a^N)*, the infix always selects the *A* and the *P* argument simultaneously and is always in the plural (e.g. 3b and 5b below). On the other hand, when the allomorph *imma^N-* is added to the verb, the slot for pronominal infixes is not filled, i.e., *-a^N-* absorbs the position of pronominal infixes.

Verbal endings usually represent the referent that assumes the *s/A* role. When a verb combines with *imm-(a^N)*, the *s/A* argument may lack a representation on the level of the verbal ending. In this case, the latter takes an invariable default form, which formally corresponds to the 3sg, for instance in the examples 2a above and 9 below.

Argument marking eventually reacts to prefixing with *imm-(a^N)* by demoting the arguments. Thus, the argument frames of underived verbs that consist of nominative-marked *s/A* and accusative-marked *P* arguments shift to prepositional marking: depending on the construction, the frames of derived verbs mark *A* and *s* arguments with the preposition *do* ‘to’ (examples 13 and 11 respectively). In constructions with reciprocal semantics, in which all referents assume both the *A* and the *P* role (*A=P⁶*, ex. 9), *A=P* arguments are marked with *do*, too. The preposition *fri* ‘against’ is a marker for demoted *P* arguments, for example in (13).

Verbal agreement as a rule selects *s/A* arguments in the nominative case. When a verb is combined with *imm-(a^N)*, verbal number agreement may select *A=P* arguments that are marked by a preposition (cf. example 7), too, or be suspended, i. e. the verb takes a default (3sg) form.⁷

In none of the constructions discussed in this section the marking by *imm-(a^N)* reduces or increases the number of arguments of the predicate, i. e. the inventory of roles is preserved (dubbed “operational diatheses” in Kulikov 2011, p. 384). However, the derivation with *imm-(a^N)* may cause the demotion of the *A* argument alone (ex. 16a), of the *A* and *P* argument simultaneously (14), or of the *s* argument (11). Unlike in Middle Welsh, where the prefixing of the etymologically cognate *ym-* may induce the demotion of the *P* argument alone (cf. example 4). This construction qualifies as morphological antipassive, i. e. a constructional type in which unlike in passives it is not the subject that is either suppressed or realized as an oblique argument, but the direct object, cf. French antipassive *Elle s’est aperçue de son erreur* vs.

⁶ We use *A=P* for subject–direct object reciprocals, meaning that both arguments act on each other and assume the *A* and the *P* role at the same time, cf. Kulikov 2011, 384f.; König and Gast 2008.

⁷ Due to the lack of subject agreement on the verb, some *imm-(a^N)* constructions are often addressed in a broad manner as impersonals, e.g. in Vendryes 1955, 192f. Note that the constructions discussed here are not to be confused with the morphological Insular Celtic category impersonal (VGK, vol. 2, 394–6).

Table 1: Argument selection schemes of infixes, verbal endings, argument marking, and agreement with underived verbs as opposed to verbs derived with *imm*-(*a*^N)

	underived verbs	verbs derived with <i>imm</i> -(<i>a</i> ^N)
arguments represented by infixes	P	a) A=P with <i>imm</i> - b) none with <i>imma</i> ^N -
arguments represented by verbal endings	S, A	a) A=P b) none (default verb form)
argument marking	nominative selects S, A, accusative selects P	a) nominative selects A=P b) <i>do</i> ‘to’ selects S, A=P c) <i>fri</i> ‘against’ selects P d) accusative selects P
arguments selected by verbal agreement (number and/or person)	S, A in the nominative	a) A=P in the nominative b) A=P marked with <i>do</i> ‘to’ c) agreement suspended

active *Elle a aperçue les montagnes* (cf. Janic 2016, p. 192; Irslinger 2017, 129f. on Middle Welsh). Such antipassives don’t seem to be attested in Early Irish.

- (4) *Ac ual byd yn ym-warandaw a llef yr erchwys, ...*
 and as be.PRS.HAB.3SG PTCL ym-hear.VN with cry ART pack
 ‘And as he is listening for the cry of his pack, ...’ (PKM 1.11f.)

In the following sections the Early Irish construction types we were able to identify are described with respect to the variables mentioned above. A summary of the types is given in table 2.

2.1 Infixes, non-default verbal ending, A=P agreement, A=P in nominative case

This construction conforms most to default argument selection in Old Irish and involves infixes, verbal endings, and case, cf. ex. 5a that contains the verb *ad·gládathar* as compared to ex. 5b with the same verb and prefixed with *imm*-(*a*^N).

- (5) a. *lase at-at-gládainn-se*
 when PV-2SG-address.IMPF.1SG-1SG
 ‘when I used to/would address you’ (ML. 62c16)
- b. *immo-s_j-naccaill-et_j iarum Ailill_j 7 Medb_j*
imm-3PL-converse-PRS.3PL then Ailill.NOM.SG and Medb.NOM.SG
 ‘Then, Alill and Medb talked with each other’ (TBF, p. 171)

In 5b the addition of *imm*-(*a*^N) to the two-place predicate *ad·gládathar* induces a typical reciprocal reading in which the participants assume both the A role and the P role simultaneously. In each morphosyntactic representation, i.e. in the pronominal infix, the verbal ending, and case assignment, both arguments share a common treatment: both are jointly represented in the infix -s- and the verbal ending -et and both nominal representations of the arguments are assigned the nominative. Verbal agreement selects the A=P argument in the nominative.

2.2 Non-default verbal ending, A=P agreement, A=P in nominative case

At a quite early date in the history of the *imm*-(*a*^N)-construction the arguments were banned from infixing and the slot formerly occupied by the infixed pronoun was filled by a non-referential element

-a^N the origin of which is unclear,⁸ giving *imm-* its characteristic shape *imma*-^N. As far as case, verbal endings, and agreement are concerned this construction type doesn't differ from the one mentioned above.

- (6) *imman-aiccet int shlúraig*
imman-see.PRS.3PL ART.NOM.PL host.NOM.PL
 'The two hosts see each other' (TBF, p. 161)

2.3 Non-default verbal ending, A=P agreement, demoted A=P arguments (*do*)

The third construction type differs from the second in one major respect: while both arguments are still selected by the verbal ending and agreement, pronominal and nominal expressions of the referents simultaneously assuming the A and P role are not selected by the nominative case, but instead are both demoted and flagged by the preposition *do* 'to' requiring the dative, cf. ex. 7: Here, the A=P arguments are both represented in the PP *doib* and in the verbal ending. Verbal number agreement also selects the A=P arguments, which runs counter to expectations, since verbal agreement is not usually triggered by arguments that are not in the nominative case in Early Irish (and generally in Indo-European languages, for that matter).⁹

The scarcity of non-third person examples makes it difficult to decide whether this construction displays both number and person agreement or whether the verb defaults to a third plural. The form *im-aptha* in ex. 8 might hint at the latter but is philologically problematic.

- (7) *ima-tuarcat doib*
imman-hit.PRS.3PL do.3PL
 'they [i. e. two groups of four men] hit each other' (TB, p. 178.20)
- (8) *im-aptha dún*
imman[?]-die.PRT.3PL to.1PL
 'we died by each other's hand'
 (Reicne Fothaid Canainne 22, CELT, <http://www.ucc.ie/celt/published/G303016/>)

2.4 Default verbal ending, no agreement, demoted A=P, s arguments (*do*)

In the fourth construction, the verbal ending is invariably in the 3SG (*fitir* in 9), i. e. verbal agreement is suspended altogether. The A=P arguments are demoted and headed by the proposition *do* 'to' as is illustrated by *dóib* in ex. 9.

- (9) *ni-ma-fitir dóib*
NEG-imman-know.PRS.3SG to.3PL
 'they don't know each other'

If one or both participants of the verbal action are nominal, two strategies are employed: either *do* governs a phrase with two coordinated dependents as in ex. 10a, or *⁊ ocus* 'and' conjoins two prepositional phrases governed by *do* as in ex. 10b.

- (10) a. *co-mma-naccai dó ⁊ a ndunad boí i mmaig Murthemne*
so.that-imman-see.3SG to.3SG and ART encamped_host.NOM.SG¹⁰ was in M. M.
 'so that he and the encamped host that was in Mag M. see each other'
 (LL, *Brisleach Mór Maige Muirthemni*), 13895

⁸ eDIL (s. v. *imma n-*) gives a third plural possessive pronoun or a third singular masculine infixed pronoun as possible origins of the nasalising *a* and Thurneysen (GOI, 517–8), linking the reciprocal particle *imm-a*-^N to the first part of adverbs of the type *imm-a-netar* 'mutually' or *imm-a-lle* 'together, simultaneously', analyses it as a third plural possessive pronoun.

⁹ Note that in this case the number value of the verbal ending may be influenced by the occurrence of the referents in the preceding context, too.

¹⁰ On the use of the nominative case in such conjunct constructions cf. GOI, p. 156.

- b. *imo-narnaicc iarum do Chongal 7 do Chonall*
imm-meet.PST.3SG then to C. and to C.
 ‘then, Congal and Conall met’

(BMR, pp. 240, 136)

This pattern also occurs with one-place verbs, cf. 11. In this example the referents clearly don’t act on each other, it rather describes an action in which all participants perform the same action simultaneously. In this paper we use the term collective simultaneous action (CSA) to describe this kind of actions.

- (11) *ima-sisedar doib*
imman-stand.PRS.3SG to.3PL
 ‘they stand together’¹¹

(Táin Bó Regamain; IT, vol. 2, pp. 229, 57)

This peculiar argument frame is not without parallel in Early Irish: the compound verb *con·ricc* ‘meets’ may use the same construction without *imm-(a-^N)* (ex. 12).

- (12) *ro-comraic dono arís do Ipseus mac Asopius 7 do Arcus*
PST-meet/fight.PST.3SG then again to I. m. A. and to A.
 ‘then, Ipseus son of Asopius and Arcus fight again’

(TnT, 3112–3113)

2.5 Default verbal ending, no agreement, demoted A (*do*) and P (*fri*) arguments

In this construction the A and P argument are demoted, but marked differently, one with the preposition *do* and the other with the preposition *fri* ‘against’, cf. ex 13.

- (13) *imma-narladair dó iarum fri-a da brathair*
imman-talk.PRT.3SG to.3SG then against-POSS.3SG two brothers
 ‘then he talked to his two brothers’

(BM2, p. 80)

In all examples of our collection the two arguments marked by *do* and *fri* respectively are never coordinated, arguments marked by *fri* on the other hand do occur in conjuncts, cf. ex. 14. It is straightforward to assume that the morphological coding reflects the separation of the A (*do*) and the P (*fri*) role. This deponent-like behaviour in terms of semantics nicely fits in with the observation made by Thurneysen (GOI, p. 518) that in this construction type *imman-* has lost all reciprocal meaning.

- (14) *ní-ma-nacige do frim-sa hi richiud nime ná fri harchangliu ná fri*
NEG-imman-see.FUT.3SG to.3SG against.1SG in heaven heaven nor against arch-angels nor against
hapstlu
apostles
 ‘he won’t see me in heaven nor the arch-angels nor the apostles’

(CD, § 8)

As for constituent order, in all examples in our sample the argument marked with *do* occurs immediately after the verb and the argument marked with *fri* invariably occupies the third position. This order is comparable to the V S_{NOM} O_{ACC} order in regular two-place predicates. In all examples at our disposal the A argument is a 3SG. This makes it impossible to decide whether the 3SG number and person values of the finite verb (3SG *ní-ma-nacige* in ex. 14) rather represent verbal agreement with their respective A argument (*do* 3SG in 14) than a construction-wide invariable default form.

This construction combines the demotion of the A argument, typical for passive constructions, with the demotion of the P argument, a process closely associated with antipassives (Creissels 2002; Janic 2016).

Again, this argument frame can be found with the underived verb *con·ricc*:

11 We take the verbal form *-sisedar* to be an instance of the hardly attested simplex *sissidir* (Schumacher 2004, 571–573) as the alternative interpretation by Windisch and Stokes taking it as a preterital form of *saidid* ‘sits; comes to a stand’ is at odds with the verbal form found in the text.

- (15) *con·arnaic dó fri Coin Culainn ar Áth Mór*
 encounter.PST.3SG to.3SG.M against C. C. at Á. M.
 ‘he encountered Cú Chulainn at Áth Mór’ (Aided Guill 7 Gairb; LL, p. 12975)

2.6 Default verbal ending, no agreement, demoted A (do), P in the accusative case

The last construction type occurs only once in our sample, and therefore its status is quite unclear. However, it is by no means excluded that there are more attestations in the corpus that may have escaped our attention. Compared to the underived construction in 16b, the prefixing of *imm-*(*a*^{-N}) to the stem *ro-saig* in 16a demotes the A argument into an oblique PP headed by *do*, whereas the P argument *comrac* remains in the accusative case. Different from the underived construction (ex. 16b), the A argument *do* 7 *Protésalús* doesn’t trigger formal agreement on the verb.

- (16) a. *immá-ríacht do 7 Protésalús comrac dessi*
imman-reach.PST.3SG to.3SG and P.NOM battle.ACC two.GEN
 ‘both he and Protésalús reached the battle of them both’
 (Togail Troí; IT, vol. 2, 2, pp. 50, 1580)
- b. *Ro·sag-at iarom tech nGarmna*
reach-PRS.3PL then house.ACC.SG G.GEN
 ‘then they reach G.’s house’ (Fled Bricrend; LU, p. 8866)

2.7 Non-finite constructions

Alongside the finite constructions discussed in this paper, a considerable number of verbal nouns prefixed with *imm-* parallel to Welsh *ym-* + VN¹² is attested from the Old Irish period onwards (17). The absence of *-a*^{-N} in this construction and its early attestation suggest that it did not develop much later than its finite counterparts.

Instances of reciprocal *imm-* + VN are usually analysed as the verbal nouns of compounds formed with the lexical preverb *imm-*, often ignoring huge semantic differences between the compound verb and the verbal noun prefixed with reciprocal *imm-*. A case in point is *imm-airecc* ‘fight, battle’ in (17) that has usually been interpreted as a verbal noun of *imm-airicc* ‘fits, happens’. With an analysis as reciprocal *imm-* + *ar-icc* ‘comes upon, meets, finds’ the semantic discrepancy between verb and verbal noun is substantially less grave.¹³ In Early Modern and Modern Irish, *imm-* + VN is no longer productive but some inherited forms remain.

- (17) *bris-ter imm-airecc fair-som*
break-PRS.PASS.3SG imm-meet.VN on.3SG.M-3SG.M
 ‘he [i. e. Satan] will be defeated in combat’ (Wb. 7c4)

2.8 Argument selection types and demotion

If we consider the strategies employed for argument selection in the six finite constructions discussed above (see Table 2), a picture of increasing externalisation emerges: while construction 1 makes ample use of verbal morphology to mark arguments, and 2 and 3 still use two out of three means of verbal encoding, constructions 4–6 have a default 3SG verb and completely rely on flagging of unbound forms to select their arguments. Single argument demotion occurs in construction 6, mirroring the usual pattern for passives, while double demotion is found in constructions 3–5, combining the demotion pattern of passives with that of antipassives.

¹² For a detailed discussion of the use of Middle Welsh *ym-* and short descriptions of the situation in Middle Breton and Middle Cornish, see Irslinger 2017 and section 4.2 below.

¹³ A collection and discussion of the relevant examples can be found in Stüber 2015, vol. 1, s. v. *immairecc* and eDIL, s. v. *immairecc*, *immairg*.

Table 2: Construction types based on argument selection.

selectors	selected argument					
	constr. 1	constr. 2	constr. 3	constr. 4	constr. 5	constr. 6
infix PRO	A=P	–	–	–	–	–
verbal ending	A=P	A=P	A=P	–	–	–
agreement	A=P	A=P	A=P	–	?	–
NOM case	A=P	A=P	–	–	–	–
ACC case	–	–	–	–	–	P
<i>do</i>	–	–	A=P	S, A=P	A	A
<i>fri</i>	–	–	–	–	P	–
demoted arguments	–	–	A=P	S, A=P	A, P	A

3 Semantic types

The comparison with the Brythonic languages indicates that the expression of reciprocity was the original function of *imm-(a^N)* (VGK, vol. 2, p. 244; Irslinger 2017, 131–132). And indeed, in the vast majority of examples *imm-(a^N)* has reciprocal force, i. e. it transforms a transitive verb like *marbaid* ‘kill’ in ex. 18b into a verb whose two or more participants assume the A and P role simultaneously and perform the verbal action onto each other as can be seen in ex. 18a. This reciprocal use is found in all constructions but 5 and 6 and thus seems to be the most wide spread in Early Irish. It mirrors the reciprocal semantics of the adverbs *imm-a-netar* ‘mutually’ and, less clearly, *imm-a-sech* ‘in turn’, combination of *imm-(a^N)* with the prepositions *etar* ‘between’ and, *sech* ‘past, beyond’.

- (18) a. *co-mmá-muirfe dóib*
that-*imman*-kill.FUT.3SG to.3PL
‘that they kill each other’ (Fled Bricrend; LU, p. 8087)
- b. *co-nid-ro-marbtas*
that-3SG.M-PST-kill.PST.SUBJ.3PL
‘that they would kill him’ (TÉ, p. 37)

In addition, our data show that *imm-(a^N)* constructions are used to describe another type of situation, namely one where all participants of the predicate map on the same role and perform the action simultaneously in local proximity. Following Wierzbicka 2009 (cf. also Majid et al. 2011) we use the label “collective simultaneous action” (CSA). Contrast, for example, the *imm-(a^N)*-construction in ex. 19a with the underived construction in ex. 19b: in the former, it is said that all members of two groups of people would die together if they met in combat, while in the latter, a single person is affected by the action.

- (19) a. *immo-taeth dóib ar chom-ūaill*
imm-die.FUT.3SG to.3PL because_of equal-pride
‘they will die because of equal pride’ (MM, § 8)
- b. *dothuit fer cach laí leis*
die.PRS.3SG man.NOM.SG every day.GEN.SG with.3SG.M
‘a man is killed by him every day’ (TBC1, p. 1522)

In some cases, it is not possible to decide whether a verb should be read as reciprocal or a CSA because neither argument structure nor semantics nor context supply sufficient evidence. For example, (20) could be interpreted as the combattants’ shields breaking each other or as both combattants’ shields breaking in the fight without necessarily acting on each other. Here, a parallel can be drawn to the semantics

of the adverb *imm-a-lle* ‘together, simultaneously’, a combination of *imm-(a^N)* and the preposition *la* ‘with’.

- (20) *immo-ro-bris* *dia* *sciathaib*
imman-PST-break.PST.3SG to.POSS.3PL shield.DAT.PL
‘their shields break (simultaneously/each other)’ (FBLDD, § 38)

We found six clear and three doubtful examples of CSA formed with *imm-(a^N)*. They mostly appear in construction 4 but ex. 16a in construction 6 (repeated here as ex. 22 for convenience) seems to represent this semantic type as well – the two combatants reach the battle fought between them simultaneously. The verbs that express CSA seem to either be intransitive (*do-tuit* ‘falls, is killed’, *con-tuit* ‘falls, is killed’, and *sissidir* ‘stands’) or are low in agentivity (*ro-saig* ‘reach’ and *gabaid* in the sense ‘decide, agree on’, cf. ex. 21). In two of the doubtful cases, the verb can be both transitive and intransitive (*brisid* ‘break’ and maybe *cloid* in the sense of ‘blunts’).

- (21) *ima-ra-gaibh* *doibh ime*
imm-PST-agree.PST.3SG to.3PL about.3SG.N
‘they agree about it’ (LSBL, pp. xi, 14)

- (22) *immá-ríacht* *do* 7 *Protésalús comrac* *dessi*
imman-reach.PST.3SG to.3SG and P.NOM battle.ACC two.GEN
‘both he and Protésalús reached the battle of them both’ (Togail Troí; IT, vol. 2, 2, pp. 50, 1580)

As already mentioned in section 2.5, construction 5, very much like a semantically deponent form, seems to express the same kind of event as underived verbal forms, the main difference being the demotion of both arguments with *do* and *fri*.

Tables 3–5 give an overview of the verbs in our sample, their possible argument frames if not used with *imm-(a^N)*, their semantics in derived *imm-(a^N)*-constructions, and in which constructions and whether they are attested in the glosses or in the later language. Several of the underived verbs below – especially the transitives in table 3 – have more than one possible argument frame, but this doesn’t seem to have any influence on which construction is used when the verb is derived by *imm-(a^N)*.

Combining a transitive verb with *imm-(a^N)* (table 3) will almost always result in a reciprocal meaning no matter what the argument frame of the underived verb looks like. The exception are two place predicates with low agentivity that can form transitive CSAs (s. ex. 16a). All examples of verbs derived by *imm-(a^N)* that behave like semantic deponents are based on transitive verbs.

A special case is *con-ricc* that can not only access the argument frame of our construction 5 without derivation (s. 2.5) but also be used as a reciprocal all on its own with a construction similar to *imm-(a^N)*-construction 4 (s. 2.4).

imm-(a^N)-constructions with labile verbs (table 4), i. e. verbs that may change their number of arguments without formal marking (Haspelmath 1993, p. 92), can often be interpreted both as reciprocal and as CSA just as their underived counterparts can be used as one-place and two-place predicates (s. table 4).

With one-place verbs (table 5), *imm-(a^N)* seems to almost exclusively derive CSAs, the possible reciprocal reading noted for *do-airissedar* being due to the ambiguity of our example.

4 Diachrony

In the following section, we first lay out what can be inferred from our data about the diachronic development within Early Irish with a short outlook towards Modern Irish to then briefly sketch the use of the cognates of *imm-(a^N)* in Brythonic.

14 The argument frame of *do-tuit* – and probably that of *con-tuit* is particularly interesting as the causer of the verbal action can be introduced with the preposition *la* while the undergoer is marked with the nominative. This frame is typical of the Old Irish passive/impersonal (Müller 1999, 21–22).

Table 3: Verb frames of two-place verbs occurring in our sample

verb	underived construction			<i>imm-(a^N)</i> construction		attestation
	meaning	A	P	meaning	type	
ad·cí	‘see’	NOM	ACC	REC	1	gloss
				REC	2, 4	later language
				= underived	5	later language
ad·cosnai	‘makes for, seeks’	NOM	ACC	REC	1	gloss
				REC	1	gloss, later language
ad·gládathar	‘addresses, talks’	NOM	PP	REC	2	gloss
			ACC	REC	4	later language
				= underived	5	later language
ar·icc	‘meets’	NOM	ACC	REC	2, 4	later language
				= underived	5	later language
as·oirc	‘cuts down’	NOM	ACC	REC	4	later language
con·boing	‘smashes, breaks’	NOM	ACC	REC	4	later language
con·ricc	‘meets’	NOM	ACC	REC	4	later language
		NOM	<i>fri</i>			
		<i>do</i>	<i>fri</i>			
		<i>do</i>	P=A			
con·sini	‘wrestles’	?		REC	3	later language
con·túairc	‘strikes’	?		REC	4	later language
do·fúabair	‘attacks’	NOM	ACC	REC	4	later language
do·fúairc	‘beats’	NOM	ACC	REC	1, 3, 4	later language
do·gaib	‘diminishes’	NOM	ACC	REC	2	later language
		NOM	<i>de</i>			
fo·beir	‘subdues’	NOM	ACC	REC	4	later language
fo·sisedar	‘defends, supports’	NOM	ACC	REC(/CSA?)	4	later language
gaibid	‘takes, accepts’	NOM	ACC	REC	4	later language
	‘chooses’	NOM	PP	CSA	4	later language
gonaid	‘pierces, wounds’	NOM	ACC	REC	3	later language
marbaid	‘kills’	NOM	ACC	REC	4	later language
múchaid	‘oppress’	NOM	ACC	REC	1	gloss
ro·cluínethar	‘hears’	NOM	ACC	REC	1	gloss
ro·finnadar	‘knows, finds out’	NOM	ACC	REC	2, 4	later language
ro·saig	‘reaches’	NOM	PP	CSA	4	later language
		NOM	ACC			

Table 4: Verb frames of labile verbs occurring in our sample

verb	underived construction			<i>imm</i> -(<i>a</i> ^N) construction		attestation
	meaning	s/A	P	meaning	type	
brisid	‘breaks’	NOM	ACC	REC/CSA	4	later language
		NOM	–			
cloïd	‘blunts’	NOM	ACC	REC/CSA	4	later language
		NOM	–			
do-airret	‘reaches, catches’	NOM	ACC	REC	4	later language
	‘arrives’	NOM	–			
sínid	‘stretches’	NOM	ACC	REC	3	later language
		NOM	–			

Table 5: Verb frames of one-place verbs occurring in our sample

verb	underived construction		<i>imm</i> -(<i>a</i> ^N) construction		attestation
	meaning	s	meaning	type	
con-tuit	‘falls’	NOM	CSA	4	later language
do-airrisedar	‘stays, remains’	NOM	CSA(/REC?)	4	later language
do-tuit	‘falls, dies’	NOM, (<i>la</i>) ¹⁴	CSA	4	later language
sissidir	‘stands’	?	CSA	4	later language

4.1 Developments in Irish

As most Early Irish texts are only preserved in manuscripts that outdate their composition by centuries, it is nigh impossible to date specific passages as they may have been altered several times during the process of transmission or added by a later scribe. When discussing the possible developments in Early Irish we only distinguish between the contemporary Old Irish of the glosses and all other texts.

In the glosses, only constructions 1 (4 exx.) and 2 (1 ex.) are found while all other constructions first appear in later manuscripts. It is thus likely that these constructions are the oldest ones. The increasing externalisation of the means employed for argument selection from construction 1 to constructions 4 and 5 and the increasing degree of argument demotion as displayed in Table 2 suggest a development from construction 1 through the stages 2 and 3 to constructions 4 and 5.

O’Brien (1938, p. 243) claims that a subset of our construction 4 – multiple representation of *do* (ex. 10b, repeated here as 23 for convenience) – developed from construction 5. This claim does not stand up to scrutiny as we could not find any examples in which both participants of the action marked with *do* are not conjoined by *ocus* ‘and’, and as there does not seem to be a semantic difference between constructions like that in ex. 23 and that in 24. All of the examples of construction 5 are semantic deponents while those with multiple marking by *do* have reciprocal meaning.

- (23) *imo-narnaicc iarum do Chongal 7 do Chonall*
imman-meet.PST.3SG then to C. and to C.
‘then, Congal and Conall met’ (BMR, pp. 240, 136)
- (24) *co-mma-naccai dó 7 a ndunad boí i mmaig Murthemne*
so.that-imman-see.PRS.3SG to.3SG and ART encamped_host.NOM.SG was in M. M.
‘so that he and the encamped host that was in Mag Murthemne see each other’
(Brislech Mór Maige Muirthemni; LL, p. 13895)

It is likely that the peculiar argument frames of constructions 3–6 developed in parallel with verbs

like *con-ricc* that can use the same frames without derivation via *imm-(a^N)* (s. exx. 12 and 15, and table 3). It is a future task to examine the argument frames of Old Irish verbs to get an overview of how frequent these patterns are and what are the principles governing the availability of these frames for certain verbs.

Concerning the semantic functions of *imm-(a^N)*, only that of reciprocity is found in the glosses (5 exx.) thus supporting the claim (e. g. Irslinger 2017, 131–132; already VGK, vol. 2, p. 244) that this function was the oldest that developed in all Insular Celtic languages. Both the CSA (surfacing in constructions 4 and 6) and the transitive functions (construction 5) seem to have developed in the course of Early Irish.

In Early Modern Irish, *imm-(a^N)* has fallen into disuse and may only surface in strongly archaising texts (e. g. 25). In Modern Irish, reciprocity is usually expressed by the phonologically unbound marker *a/le chéile* that, as ex. 26 shows, has been present from Middle Irish onwards (Nolan 2000, 48–55; eDIL, s. v. *céile*; N. Ó Dónaill and de Bhaldraithe 1977, s.v. *céile*). Combinations of *imm-* and verbal noun still exist in Modern Irish but are no longer productive.

- (25) *ima-comrainic dhóibh combatar mescc ar mhesg*
imman-meet.PST.3SG to.3PL that.3PL.were mixed on mixed
 ‘they met so that they were very mixed’ (BARD, pp. 256, 8)

- (26) *ro-thúairc cach a chéile*
PST-smite.PST.3SG everyone 3SG.M.POSS other
 ‘they smite each other’ (TÉ, p. 139)

4.2 Brythonic cognates of *imm-(a^N)*

Cognates of *imm-(a^N)* can be found in all three extant Brythonic languages – Middle Welsh *ym-*, Middle Breton *em-*, and Middle Cornish *em-*, *om-*, *ym-* – where it mainly has reflexive and reciprocal force.

While the Old Welsh corpus contains only two doubtful examples that seem to mirror our Early Irish construction 1 (Irslinger 2014, 191–192; Irslinger 2017, p. 110), the abundance of forms found in Middle Welsh speaks of the high productivity of the morph *ym-* at least in the later Middle Ages. Unlike the Early Irish constructions discussed in this paper, Middle Welsh *ym-* never co-occurs with verbal *p*-markers and the augment *ry* is always prefixed to *ym-* rather than infixes between *ym* and the verbal stem (ex. 27). The Middle Welsh construction underwent several additional semantic and functional developments resulting, amongst others, in a discontinuous reciprocal and an antipassive construction (for a full discussion, see Irslinger 2017).

- (27) *na-ry-ym-wel-ssynt*
NEG-PST-REC-see-PLUP.3SG
 ‘they had not seen each other’ (Llanstephan 1, 147)

In Middle Breton, *em-* is usually preceded by a pronominal index that is referentially identical with the verbal ending (*-aff* in 28a) or the overt argument (*rouanez* in 28b). In Modern Breton, this pronominal element is replaced with invariable *en-* (Kervella 1976, p. 157). Historically, *en-* derives from the 3SG.M and has lost all referential value in this constellation. Breton uses *-em-* in non-reflexive, valency-decreasing functions, too: the underived stem *caffout* ‘find something somewhere’, that corresponds to the derived predicate *-em-caffout* ‘to be somewhere’ (coined on French *se trouver*, cf. 28b), is a regular three-place predicate. Further semantic and functional developments of the marker are probable but have not been researched yet (Hemon 1975, 271–273; Irslinger 2017, p. 133).

- (28) a. *dich e-m_i-em-ro-aff_i*
to.2HON AFF-1SG-REFL-give-PRS.1SG
 ‘to you (sc. Jesus) I give myself’ B 493
- b. *rouanez_i en vn hent hos_i-em-caffas*
king.PL on ART.INDEF way 3PL-em-find.PST
 ‘Kings were on their way (sc. to Bethlehem)’ NL 428

Little research has been conducted on the usage of the cognate morpheme in Cornish. The occurrence of *om-* seems to block the use of infixed object pronouns (ex. 29) and the whole construction is lost before the Late Cornish period (Toorians n.d., § 5.6; N. J. A. Williams 2011, p. 325).

- (29) *ze ves y a-om-denn-as*
 away 3PL AFF-REFL-pull-PST.3SG
 ‘away they withdrew’

(Pascon agan Arluth: 68.2)

5 Summary and discussion

Our findings can be summarised as follows: Although *imm-(a^N)* is cognate with the lexical preverb *imm-*, it should be treated as a separate morphological item and as part of the Old Irish inventory of preverbal conjunct particles. It can be used in at least six distinct finite verbal constructions as well as with verbal nouns forming reciprocals, collective simultaneous action constructions, and semantically deponent, plain active two-place predicates.

From a morphosyntactic point of view, *imm-(a^N)* can occur in six construction types that differ with respect to the means of argument selection employed: while the oldest, reciprocal, construction uses referentially identical A and P markers on the verb and flags nominal A=P arguments with the nominative, in the youngest constructions the former A and P slots are either occupied by non-referential material or blocked and the arguments are flagged by the prepositions *do* ‘to’ and *fri* ‘against’ (s. table 2).

The addition of *imm-(a^N)* does not alter the number of arguments of a verb but may cause the demotion of the s and A=P argument alone or, combining features of both the passive and the antipassive, both A and P arguments at the same time. Moreover, the functions of derived verbs seem partly to be determined by the valency of the verb *imm-(a^N)* attaches to: while intransitive verbs usually form reciprocals and semantic deponents in combination with *imm-(a^N)* (the exception being verbs with low agentivity), intransitive verbs have a strong inclination towards forming CSA constructions. Labile verbs may form both reciprocals and CSAs.

The developments that derived the preposition *imb*, *imm*, the lexical preverb *imm-*, and *imm-(a^N)* from their common Proto-Celtic ancestor **ambi-* shed some light on the process of grammaticalisation involved: some time after what McCone (1997, 89–90) calls ‘primary composition’ (i. e. the prehistoric stage of Irish in which most compound verbs consisting of one to five prepositions and a simple verb were formed), *imm-* had developed a wide range of functions, two prominent of which were the lexical meaning ‘around’ as in *imm-tét* ‘goes around, travels’ or *imm-tá* ‘is around’ and the more grammatical function of reciprocity. Along the semantic differences between these two functions, *imm-* was reanalysed as two different morphemes, one of which followed the path of lexicalisation and subsequent univerbation while the other followed the path of grammaticalisation acquiring the morphosyntactic and morphonologic features of Early Irish conjunct particles.¹⁵

There is evidence that the preverb *con-* cognate with the preposition *com* ‘with’ was on the verge of undergoing a similar split: as many of its compounds have a meaning component ‘together’ (e. g. *con-tuit* ‘fall, die together’ or *con-laig* ‘lies with, cohabits’), it bears some of the properties of a CSA marker and in some cases (e. g. *con-ricc* ‘meets’) it even assumes a reciprocal function. Most strikingly, *con-ricc* can access the same argument frames as *imm-(a^N)*, namely that of constructions 3 and 4 flagging the A=P argument with *do* with or without the suspension of agreement and that of construction 5 flagging A arguments with *do*, P arguments with *fri* with the suspension of agreement.

Some phenomena and construction types discussed in this article have in common that they are rather atypical from an areal and/or phylogenetic perspective, in particular double demotion, morphological antipassives, and verbal agreement with non-nominative s/A arguments. Their quick emergence and exaptation beyond reciprocals as well as their short-livedness suggest that such structures are not dispreferred to a degree as to be banned from arising in a systematic way (e. g. by a strong family and/or

¹⁵ This process is reminiscent of the split of *ro-* into a lexical preverb and the augment as detailed in McCone 2006, 190–199.

areal bias). Moreover, such dispreferred structures may evolve spontaneously and exapt quickly, but on the long run they are less likely to be integrated into parts of the grammar outside the specific domain in which they originated (i. e. reciprocals), and even in their pristine environment they are short-lived. In the case of the phenomena discussed in this article, the short-livedness may also relate to the overall low frequency of reciprocals (cf. Evans et al. 2011, 12–14).

Abbreviations

- B Emile Ernault (1888). *Le mystère de Sainte Barbe. Tragédie bretonne, texte de 1557*. Publié avec traduction française, introduction et dictionnaire étymologique du breton moyen. Paris: Thorin.
- BARD Denis Murphy, ed. (1895). *Beatha Aodha Ruaidh ui Dhomhnaill. The Life of Hugh Roe O'Donnell, Prince of Tirconnell*. Dublin: Fallon & Co.
- BM2 Whitley Stokes (1891). “The second battle of Moytura”. In: *Revue Celtique* 12, pp. 52–130.
- BMR Carl Marstrander (1911). “A New Version of the Battle of Mag Rath”. In: *Ériu* 5, pp. 226–247.
- CD James G. O’Keeffe (1905). “Cáin Domnaig”. In: *Ériu* 2, pp. 189–214.
- CELT CELT. Corpus of Electronic Texts. URL: <http://celt.ucc.ie>.
- eDIL *Dictionary of the Irish Language Based Mainly on Old and Middle Irish Materials*. Dublin. URL: <http://edil.qub.ac.uk/>.
- FBLDD Kaarina Hollo (2005). *Fled Bricrenn ocus Loinges mac nDuíl Dermait, and its Place in the Irish Literary and Oral Narrative Traditions*. A Critical Edition with Introduction, Notes, Translation, Bibliography and Vocabulary. Maynooth: Department of Old and Middle Irish, National University of Ireland.
- GOI Rudolf Thurneysen (1946). *A Grammar of Old Irish*. Trans. by Daniel A. Binchy and Osborn Bergin. Revised and enlarged edition with supplement. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.
- IT Ernst Windisch and Whitley Stokes (n.d.). *Irische Texte. Mit Übersetzungen und Wörterbuch*. 4 vols. Leipzig: Hirzel.
- LL Richard I. Best, Osborn Bergin, et al., eds. (n.d.). *The Book of Leinster, formerly Lebar na Núachongbála*. 6 vols. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.
- LSBL Whitley Stokes (1890). *Lives of the Saints from the Book of Lismore*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- LU Richard I. Best and Osborn Bergin (1929). *Lebor na hUidre. Book of the Dun Cow*. Dublin & London: Hodges, Figgis, & Co.; Williams & Norgate.
- MM Thomas P. O’Nolan (1912). *Mór of Munster and the tragic fate of Cuanu son of Cailchin*. London: Hodges, Figgis, & Co.
- NL. Goulven Pennaod (1984). *An Novelov ancien ha devot. Les Noels anciens et dévots. Texte de 1650*. Accompagné d’une traduction française de Goulven Pennaod. Quimper: Preder.
- PKM Ifor Williams (1930). *Pedeir keinc y Mabinogi allan o Lyfr Gwyn Rhydderch*. Caerdydd: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru.
- TB Brian O’Looney (1870). “Tochmarc Bec-fola”. In: *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Irish MSS series* 1.1, pp. 172–202.
- TBC1 Cecile O’Rahilly (1976). *Táin Bó Cúalnge. Recension I*. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.
- TBF Wolfgang Meid (1974). *Táin bó Fraích*. 2nd ed. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.
- TÉ Caoimhín Ó Dónaill (2005). *Talland Étair*. A critical edition with introduction, translation, textual notes, bibliography and vocabulary. Maynooth: Department of Old and Middle Irish, National University of Ireland.
- TnT George Calder (1922). *Togail na Tebe. The Thebaid of Statius*. The Irish text. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- VGK Holger Pedersen (n.d.). *Vergleichende Grammatik der keltischen Sprachen*. 2 vols. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

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